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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

Executive Registry

75-5633

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- 2 APR 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable James R. Schlesinger
The Secretary of Defense

SUBJECT: Discussion of the Current South
Vietnamese Military and Political
Situation with President Thieu

1. Attached is a memorandum for the record concerning a meeting held on 2 April 1975 between President Nguyen Van Thieu and Mr. Theodore G. Shackley, Chief of East Asia Division, and Mr. Thomas Polgar, Chief of Station, Vietnam. Following a discussion of the current situation in South Vietnam and Hanoi's probable options, Thieu outlined his plans for reorganization of the South Vietnamese Armed Forces, indicating that he planned to upgrade existing main force units by putting Regional Force personnel into already existing Army formations and to regroup the forces that had retreated from Military Regions 1 and 2. On the subject of political dynamics, Thieu indicated that he had been presented with several proposals for reorganization of the Government, and said he was pursuing at this time Prime Minister Tran Thien Khiem's option of trying to make the Government more efficient and broader based, although this effort was not moving very rapidly. If Khiem is unsuccessful, Thieu said he is willing to accept a new Prime Minister who could show him he could organize a Government of competent, anti-communist personalities with political support.

(EXECUTIVE REGISTRY FILE)

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2. A copy of the attached memorandum has been provided Secretary Kissinger.

FOR THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR OPERATIONS:

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Attachment:
As Stated

cc: General George S. Brown, USAF
Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff

The Honorable Philip C. Habib
Assistant Secretary for East Asian
and Pacific Affairs

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ORIG:C/VNO

5216/1011 (2 April 1975)

Distribution:

Orig - Addressee

- 1 - Gen George S. Brown
- 1 - The Honorable Philip C. Habib
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SUBJECT: MEETING WITH PRESIDENT THIEU ON 2 APRIL 1975

1. INTRODUCTION

ON 1 APRIL 1975 MR. POLGAR WAS CONTACTED BY GENERAL QUANG, THE NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISER TO PRESIDENT THIEU, WITH THE REQUEST THAT MESSRS. SHACKLEY AND POLGAR PROVIDE PRESIDENT THIEU A BRIEFING ON THE CURRENT MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM. GENERAL QUANG STATED THAT THE 2 APRIL MEETING WOULD ALSO GIVE PRESIDENT THIEU AN OPPORTUNITY TO TALK WITH MR. SHACKLEY, AS PRESIDENT THIEU KNEW FROM GENERAL QUANG'S DAILY BRIEFING THAT MR. SHACKLEY WAS IN SOUTH VIETNAM AS PART OF GENERAL WEYAND'S TASK FORCE. WITH AMBASSADOR MARTIN'S CONCURRENCE THE BRIEFING WAS ARRANGED FOR NOON, 2 APRIL.

2. DISCUSSION

A. A MESSAGE FROM MR. COLBY, THE DCI, TO PRESIDENT THIEU.

AT THE OPENING OF THE MEETING MR. SHACKLEY TOLD PRESIDENT THIEU THAT PRIOR TO HIS DEPARTURE FROM WASHINGTON, MR. COLBY HAD ASKED THAT HIS BEST WISHES BE EXTENDED TO PRESIDENT THIEU. IN ADDITION, MR. SHACKLEY STRESSED THAT MR. COLBY WANTED TO REITERATE TO PRESIDENT THIEU THE DESIRE OF CIA TO COOPERATE FULLY WITH THE GVN

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IN AN INTELLIGENCE EXCHANGE ON HANOI'S PLANS, INTENTIONS AND CAPABILITIES IN ORDER THAT THE UNITED STATES AND THE GVN MIGHT BOTH WORK FROM THE SAME DATA BASE IN TERMS OF FORMULATING PERCEPTIONS OF WHAT HANOI MIGHT DO IN THE FUTURE. MR. SHACKLEY THEN EXPRESSED PLEASURE AT THE OPPORTUNITY TO TALK WITH PRESIDENT THIEU ABOUT INTELLIGENCE-RELATED MATTERS. PRESIDENT THIEU ASKED IN THIS CONTEXT THAT HIS BEST WISHES BE CONVEYED TO MR. COLBY WITH THE COMMENT THAT THIEU AND PRIME MINISTER KHIEM WERE MOST APPRECIATIVE OF THE PAST COOPERATION WHICH HAD TAKEN PLACE BETWEEN CIA AND THE GVN INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY. PRESIDENT THIEU THEN WENT ON TO SAY THAT THE EFFORT WHICH HAD BEEN PUT INTO DEVELOPING A GVN INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY DURING MR. SHACKLEY'S SERVICE IN SOUTH VIETNAM WAS BEING CONTINUED BY MR. POLGAR AND HIS ASSOCIATES WITH THE NET RESULT THAT THE GVN INTELLIGENCE SERVICES HAD IMPROVED OVER THE YEARS AND WERE NOW PROVIDING THE PRESIDENT OF SOUTH VIETNAM WITH MORE AND BETTER INTELLIGENCE.

B. NORTH VIETNAMESE FORCES AND THEIR CURRENT DEPLOYMENT.

MR. POLGAR THEN TOOK OVER THE BRIEFING AND ADVISED PRESIDENT THIEU THAT INFORMATION WAS NOW AVAILABLE WHICH INDICATED THAT THE 312TH DIVISION HAD STARTED

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MOVING SOUTHWARD ON 30 MARCH AND WAS NOW BELIEVED TO BE IN THE THO SON AREA OF NORTH VIETNAM, THE 338TH DIVISION HAD STARTED MOVING SOUTHWARD IN NORTH VIETNAM ON 13 FEBRUARY AND WAS NOW IN THE GENERAL AREA OF XON HO I, WHILE THE 320B DIVISION HAD ALSO MOVED SOUTH AND ELEMENTS OF THIS DIVISION HAD BEEN CONFIRMED IN THE HUE AREA AS OF 31 MARCH 1975. IN ADDITION, MR. POLGAR SAID THAT ELEMENTS OF THE 37TH AIR DEFENSE DIVISION WERE NOW APPEARING IN THE TAY NINH AREA. ALL OF THIS INFORMATION ON THE MOVEMENT OF NORTH VIETNAMESE DIVISIONS IN NORTH VIETNAM AND TO SOUTH VIETNAM SEEMED TO BE NEW INTELLIGENCE FOR PRESIDENT THIEU, AND HE TOOK APPROPRIATE NOTE OF THIS DATA ON HIS NOTE PAD. MR. POLGAR THEN REVIEWED FOR PRESIDENT THIEU THE CURRENT DISPOSITION OF NVA DIVISIONAL ENTITIES IN SOUTH VIETNAM. THIS COVERED THE 17 UNITS THAT WERE DEPLOYED IN SOUTH VIETNAM AS OF 2 APRIL 1975. PRESIDENT THIEU ALSO TOOK NOTES ON THESE UNITS AND COMPARED MR. POLGAR'S INFORMATION WITH A WORKSHEET THAT WAS ON HIS DESK, WHICH CARRIED OB STATISTICS AS PREPARED BY THE JGS J-2.

C. HANOI'S INTENTIONS.

MR. SHACKLEY DISCUSSED THE TOPIC OF HANOI'S INTENTIONS WITH PRESIDENT THIEU AND MADE THE POINT THAT

WHILE HARD INTELLIGENCE WAS LACKING, THERE DID APPEAR TO BE TWO OPTIONS WHICH HANOI MAY NOW BE CONSIDERING. THESE OPTIONS WERE DISCUSSED AS FOLLOWS:

(1) EXPLOIT FULLY THE TACTICAL ADVANTAGE AND MOMENTUM WHICH HANOI HAS OBTAINED ON THE BATTLEFIELD IN ORDER TO INFLICT A FINAL AND TOTAL MILITARY DEFEAT ON THE GVN AS PROMPTLY AS POSSIBLE.

(2) EXPLOIT THE CURRENT FLUID SITUATION ON THE BATTLEFIELD IN ORDER TO CONSOLIDATE EXISTING GAINS WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY ALSO ATTEMPTING TO TAKE TAY NINH CITY AND MAKE INROADS IN THE DELTA. IT WAS STRESSED THAT UNDER THIS OPTION IN THE VERY NEAR FUTURE OR AS SOON AS THE CONSOLIDATION TAKES PLACE (WHETHER OR NOT TAY NINH CITY IS CAPTURED) HANOI COULD DEMAND NEGOTIATIONS IN AN ATTEMPT TO OBTAIN A POLITICAL VICTORY OVER SOUTH VIETNAM. IF NEGOTIATIONS SHOULD LEAD TO A SOLUTION ACCEPTABLE TO HANOI, WE WOULD ANTICIPATE THAT THERE WOULD BE A CEASEFIRE AND A COALITION GOVERNMENT AS ENVISIONED BY THE COMMUNISTS. IF THE GVN DID NOT AGREE TO A POLITICAL SOLUTION WHICH WAS ACCEPTABLE TO HANOI, THEN IT WAS ANTICIPATED THAT HANOI WOULD GO BACK

ON THE OFFENSIVE IN ORDER TO IMPOSE A TOTAL MILITARY VICTORY ON SOUTH VIETNAM IN EITHER 1975 OR 1976. IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PARAGRAPH 2-C REMARKS, MR. POLGAR STATED THAT ONE REGIMENT OF THE 5TH DIVISION HAD RECENTLY BEEN DETECTED MOVING INTO MR-4, THUS THE IMMEDIATE NVA PRESSURE ON TAY NINH MIGHT BE LESSENED, ALTHOUGH AT THE EXPENSE OF THE NORTHERN DELTA.

PRESIDENT THIEU STATED THAT HE HAD NO QUARREL WITH OUR DEFINITION OF THESE OPTIONS, AND HE BELIEVED THAT BOTH WERE CURRENTLY UNDER CONSIDERATION BY HANOI. AT THE SAME TIME, HE EXPRESSED THE VIEW THAT PERHAPS HANOI WAS MORE INCLINED TOWARD OBTAINING A POLITICAL RATHER THAN A MILITARY VICTORY. THE PRESIDENT THEN WENT ON TO OUTLINE HIS OPINION THAT A MOVEMENT OF THE 5TH DIVISION INTO THE DELTA COULD REFLECT A DESIRE BY HANOI TO TIE DOWN EXISTING GVN FORCES IN MR-4. IT WAS PRESIDENT THIEU'S VIEW THAT IF THE 3RD DIVISION MOVED INTO THE DELTA HE WOULD HAVE TO REGARD THIS AS A CONFIRMATION OF HANOI'S INTENTIONS TO USE A FOUR DIVISIONAL FORCE TO IMMOBILIZE

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THREE ARVN DIVISIONS IN THE DELTA. IF THE NVA MOVED TO TIE DOWN GVN FORCES IN THE DELTA, PRESIDENT THIEU EXPECTED THAT THEY WOULD ALSO MOVE SOME OF THEIR FORCES SOUTHWARD FROM MR-2 IN ORDER TO INCREASE THEIR SUPERIORITY IN MR-3. AT THAT POINT HANOI WOULD TRY TO PUT MILITARY PRESSURE ON SAIGON AS A PRELUDE TO OPENING A DISCUSSION ON THE TOPIC OF PEACE ON HANOI'S TERMS. UNDER SUCH A SCENARIO, PRESIDENT THIEU FELT THAT HE WOULD HAVE TO RESPOND TO A CALL FOR PEACE NEGOTIATIONS BECAUSE HE WAS ON RECORD AS BEING IN FAVOR OF PEACE. AT THE SAME TIME, PRESIDENT THIEU EXPECTED THAT HANOI WOULD NEGOTIATE WITH SAIGON UNDER THE TALK/FIGHT CONCEPT AND THERE WOULD BE NO CEASEFIRE DURING THE NEGOTIATIONS. IN VIEW OF THIS, PRESIDENT THIEU STATED THAT HIS MOST PRESSING PROBLEM WAS ONE OF REORGANIZING THE ARVN FORCE STRUCTURE.

D. PLANS FOR THE REORGANIZATION OF ARVN.

PRESIDENT THIEU MOVED FROM A DISCUSSION OF ITEM 2.0 C TO SAY THAT HE WAS AWARE OF THE FACT THAT SINCE THE PARIS PEACE ACCORDS HAD BEEN SIGNED THE BALANCE OF FORCES IN SOUTH VIETNAM HAD SHIFTED IN HANOI'S FAVOR. BASED

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ON THIS CONCLUSION, HANOI HAD LAUNCHED A MAIN FORCE WAR AND THE RESULTS OF THAT ACTIVITY WERE NOW KNOWN IN THAT THE GVN HAD LOST MR-1 AND ALSO WAS UNDER SEVERE PRESSURE IN THE REMINING PORTIONS OF MR-2. PRESIDENT THIEU STATED THAT HE WAS DRAWING THE APPROPRIATE CONCLUSIONS FROM THIS TURN OF EVENTS. THE PRESIDENT THEN WENT ON TO SAY THAT HE REGARDED PREVIOUS GVN CONCEPTS RELATIVE TO THE RF/PF AND PEOPLES SELF-DEFENSE FORCES AS BEING OBSOLETE. BASED ON THIS CONCLUSION, PRESIDENT THIEU PLANNED TO UPGRADE EXISTING ARVN UNITS BY PUTTING RF PERSONNEL INTO ALREADY ORGANIZED ARVN FORMATIONS. ADDITIONALLY, THE PRESIDENT WAS GIVING PRIORITY ATTENTION TO REGROUPING THE FORCES THAT HAD RETREATED FROM MRS-1 AND 2. IT WAS THE PRESIDENT'S EXPRESSED HOPE THAT HE COULD REGROUP THESE MEN QUICKLY INTO DIVISION-SIZE FORMATIONS. PRESIDENT THIEU POINTED OUT, HOWEVER, THAT ACCORDING TO THE JGS HE COULD ONLY EXPECT TO DEVELOP ONE DIVISION PER MONTH OUT OF THE FORCES THAT WERE BEING REGROUPED. IN VIEW OF THIS, PRESIDENT THIEU MADE THE POINT THAT HIS MOST PRESSING NEED WAS FOR TIME, I.E., TIME TO REBUILD HIS FORCE STRUCTURE.

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MR. SHACKLEY NOTED AT THAT JUNCTURE THAT THE FUTURE GVN FORCE STRUCTURE WAS AN ISSUE THAT GENERAL WEYAND WAS LOOKING FORWARD TO DISCUSSING WITH PRESIDENT THIEU. THE PRESIDENT PICKED UP THE SIGNAL IN THIS COMMENT AND STATED THAT HE WOULD ELABORATE HIS VIEWS ON THIS MATTER IN THE DISCUSSIONS WITH GENERAL WEYAND AND AMBASSADOR MARTIN.

E. POLITICAL DYNAMICS IN SOUTH VIETNAM.

PRESIDENT THIEU STATED THAT HE WANTED TO TAKE THE OPPORTUNITY OF BEING ABLE TO TALK WITH MESSRS. POLGAR AND SHACKLEY TO OUTLINE TO THEM SOME OF THE PROBLEMS THAT HE WAS CURRENTLY FACING IN THE POLITICAL ARENA. THE PRESIDENT STATED THAT HE THOUGHT THAT IT WAS IMPORTANT THAT AMERICAN INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS UNDERSTAND HIS VIEW OF THE SITUATION AND, WITHOUT PAUSING FURTHER, THE PRESIDENT LAUNCHED INTO WHAT HE PERCEIVED TO BE THE CURRENT POLITICAL PRESSURES THAT WERE WORKING ON HIM. THIS PART OF THE CONVERSATION WAS ACCOMPANIED BY THE GRAPHIC DRAWING OF DIAGRAMS ON A PIECE OF PAPER AND THE ORGANIZATION OF HIS PRESENTATION INTO THREE PARTS. THESE PARTS CAN BE DESCRIBED AS FOLLOWS:

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(1) MODERATE POLITICIANS. PRESIDENT THIEU STATED THAT A MONTH OR SO AGO HE HAD BEEN APPROACHED BY TRAN QUOC BUI, BUI DIEM, DAN VAN SUNG AND TRAN VAN DO WITH THE PROPOSAL THAT THE GVN BE REORGANIZED IN ORDER THAT THERE COULD BE BOTH GREATER GOVERNMENTAL EFFICIENCY AS WELL AS A BROADENING OF THE POLITICAL BASE. ACCORDING TO PRESIDENT THIEU THESE GENTLEMEN HAD TOLD HIM THAT THEY WERE RECOMMENDING THIS REORGANIZATION IN ORDER TO MAKE THE GOVERNMENT MORE EFFICIENT. IN ESSENCE, THEY CLAIMED TO WANT TO PURSUE THE CURRENT POLICIES OF THE GVN BUT ONLY MORE EFFICIENTLY. AS A RESULT, PRESIDENT THIEU HAD TOLD THEM TO OUTLINE THEIR PROPOSALS ON PAPER AND HE WOULD STUDY THEIR VIEWS. PARALLEL TO THIS OVERTURE, PRESIDENT THIEU HAD NOTED THAT GENERAL KY, FATHER THANH, VARIOUS BUDDHISTS AND A NUMBER OF LAWYERS WERE GETTING TOGETHER TO SUGGEST THAT THE GOVERNMENT BE REORGANIZED ON THE BASIS THAT PRESIDENT THIEU WOULD REMAIN AS CHIEF OF STATE BUT THE ACTUAL POWERS OF GOVERNMENT WOULD BE TURNED OVER TO A PRIME MINISTER

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LIKE GENERAL KY. UNDER THIS AGREEMENT, THE SPONSORS OF THIS PROPOSAL WOULD HAVE DE FACTO POWER TRANSFERRED TO THEM IN A LEGAL WAY AND THEY WOULD THEN ATTEMPT TO MAKE THE GOVERNMENT FUNCTION MORE EFFECTIVELY WHILE ATTEMPTING TO REACH SOME POLITICAL SOLUTION WITH HANOI. PRESIDENT THIEU STATED THAT HE WAS NOT SYMPATHETIC TO THIS PROPOSAL BECAUSE HE COULD NOT ENVISION THAT A GOVERNMENT HEADED BY GENERAL KY OR ANYONE ELSE IN THIS GROUP OF POLITICIANS WOULD BE AN ACCEPTABLE NEGOTIATING PARTNER TO HANOI.

(2) SENATOR TRAN VAN LAM. PRESIDENT THIEU THEN WENT ON TO SAY THAT HE HAD BEEN CONTACTED IN THE PAST WEEK AND AGAIN ON 1 APRIL BY SENATE PRESIDENT TRAN VAN LAM, WHO WAS PROPOSING THAT HE BECOME EITHER THE PRIME MINISTER OR THE ACTING HEAD OF STATE. ACCORDING TO PRESIDENT THIEU, SENATOR LAM ENVISIONED THAT IF HE WERE THE HEAD OF THE GOVERNMENT HE WOULD BE ABLE TO NEGOTIATE AN ACCOMMODATION WITH HANOI OR A COALITION GOVERNMENT INCLUDING NATIONAL LIBERATION

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FRONT ELEMENTS. PRESIDENT THIEU STATED THAT HE FOUND THIS PROPOSAL TO BE UNREALISTIC FOR THERE WAS NO EVIDENCE THAT HANOI WOULD NEGOTIATE WITH SENATOR LAM. IN ADDITION, HE COULD NOT CONCEIVE OF HANOI WANTING AN ACCOMMODATION WHEN THEY HAD THE UPPER HAND ON THE BATTLEFIELD.

(3) REORGANIZATION OF THE GOVERNMENT BY PRIME MINISTER KHIEM. PRESIDENT THIEU STATED THAT THE THIRD POLITICAL FORCE IN MOTION AT THIS TIME WAS REPRESENTED BY PRIME MINISTER KHIEM'S EFFORTS TO REORGANIZE THE GOVERNMENT IN ORDER TO MAKE IT MORE EFFICIENT AND BROADER BASED. THIS EFFORT WAS NOT MOVING RAPIDLY PER PRESIDENT THIEU BECAUSE PRIME MINISTER KHIEM WAS HAVING DIFFICULTY IN GETTING ANYBODY TO AGREE TO SERVE IN THE GOVERNMENT WHO WAS COMPETENT, AN ANTI-COMMUNIST AND HAD ANY KIND OF A POLITICAL FOLLOWING. THIS WAS DUE IN PART BECAUSE THESE PEOPLE WANTED PORTFOLIOS OF HIGHER STATURE IN OTHER GOVERNMENTS THAT THEY THOUGHT MIGHT BE FORMED, I.E., BY SENATOR LAM OR GENERAL KY. PRESIDENT THIEU

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NOTED THAT PRIME MINISTER KHIEM WAS ALSO HAVING PROBLEMS IN FINDING PEOPLE WHO WOULD AGREE TO SERVE IN A NATIONAL ADVISOR COUNCIL WHICH WOULD SUPPORT KHIEM'S NEW GOVERNMENT.

AFTER OUTLINING THE ABOVE OPTIONS, PRESIDENT THIEU STATED THAT FOR THE MOMENT HE WAS PREPARED TO PURSUE OPTION (3) OR, IF KHIEM COULD NOT FORM A GOVERNMENT, HE WAS WILLING TO ACCEPT A NEW PRIME MINISTER WHO COULD SHOW HIM THAT HE COULD ORGANIZE A GOVERNMENT OF COMPETENT, ANTI-COMMUNIST PERSONALITIES WITH POLITICAL SUPPORT. IN THIS CONTEXT, MR. SHACKLEY STATED THAT IF THE PRESIDENT WERE DETERMINED TO PURSUE THE OPTION INHERENT IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A NEW GOVERNMENT VIA PRIME MINISTER KHEIM, HE SHOULD DO SO PROMPTLY. PRESIDENT THIEU ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THERE WAS A NEED FOR MOVING RAPIDLY. THE CONVERSATION THEN SHIFTED INTO A BRIEF REMARK OR TWO ON MORALE, AND THE PRESIDENT ACKNOWLEDGED THAT HE HAD TO ADDRESS HIMSELF TO THE MORALE ISSUE IN A PROMPT MANNER.

3. COMMENTS.

MR. SHACKLEY HAD NOT SEEN PRESIDENT THIEU SINCE AUGUST 1973, THEREFORE THERE WAS AN OPPORTUNITY TO DRAW SOME CONTRASTS. IN A PHYSICAL SENSE, PRESIDENT THIEU

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HAD NOT CHANGED IN ANY NOTICEABLE WAY EXCEPT THAT HE HAD ACQUIRED A LITTLE MORE GRAY HAIR. IN TERMS OF ATTITUDES, PRESIDENT THIEU WAS QUITE SUBDUED IN CONTRAST WITH PREVIOUS MEETINGS WHICH MR. SHACKLEY HAD HAD WITH HIM. PRESIDENT THIEU WAS ALERT, HOWEVER, AND SEEMED TO HAVE A GOOD GRASP OF THE BASIC FACTORS CONFRONTING HIM AND THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE POPULATION. ON THE OTHER HAND, HE APPEARED TO US LESS REALISTIC IN ESTIMATING THE TIME FACTOR AVAILABLE FOR HIS TYPE OF SOLUTION, AND HAD SOME DIFFICULTY ARTICULATING SOME OF HIS THOUGHTS. AT TIMES HE SEEMED TO BE ALMOST CHOKED UP WITH EMOTION AS HE DISCUSSED NATIONAL PROBLEMS. IT WAS ALSO CLEAR IN THIS MEETING THAT THE PRESIDENT WANTED TO USE THIS CONVERSATION TO CONVEY TO MESSRS. SHACKLEY AND POLGAR HIS OWN AWARENESS OF CURRENT POLITICAL CROSSCURRENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM. HE DID THIS IN A STRAIGHT-FORWARD, LOW KEY MANNER. WE COULD NOT FAULT HIS ANALYSIS OF THE DOMESTIC SITUATION BUT WE DID SENSE A CERTAIN REMOTENESS AND LACK OF HIS PREVIOUS AURA OF COMMANDING CONFIDENCE. IT WAS QUITE EVIDENT THAT HE WANTED HIS VIEWS ON THE INTERNAL POLITICAL SITUATION PASSED TO KEY POLICY MAKERS IN THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT SO THAT THEY WOULD UNDERSTAND THAT HE KNEW WHAT WAS GOING ON IN HIS DOMESTIC FRONT.

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